Father Damien

Leper Apostle of Molokai

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(Author Unknown)

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Chapter I

Childhood

In the little Belgian village of Tremaloo, near the town of Malignes, seven miles from the historic city of Louvain, there dwelt a humble family of the farmer class named De Veuster. They were worthy people from thrifty, hard-working yeomen stock and lived a quiet and simple life in the country. They worked from sunrise to sunset performing difficult, manual labor in the fields—tilling, sowing, reaping—with very little intermission or distraction save the evening rest around their comfortable fireside and a rare, occasional visit to the neighboring city of Louvain.

Francois and Catherine De Veuster at this time were the happy parents of five children, and on 3 January 1840, a sixth child was born and was called Joseph, after Our Lady's Spouse.

From babyhood, Joseph seemed drawn mysteriously to holy things and once at the age of four, being missed from his home on a busy day in the village, was sought in vain by his distraught parents. He was found at length in the little church rapt in meditation at the foot of the altar, a lonely figure kneeling in the flickering rays of the little red lamp. It would seem as if he already felt that gentle call, which was to grow ever louder and more insistent, until it led him on in obedient and willing response to the shore of that living death on the Grey Island of Molokai. His natural instinct for religion was ever fostered by the devout example of his parents, especially of his mother.

Each evening, when the toil of the day was over, the family assembled in the farmhouse kitchen, where the wood-fire crackled on the wide hearth and the copper utensils winked and shone in the dancing firelight. Then the mother took down the great volume of the lives of the saints printed in old Flemish and read the stirring episodes of those heroes and martyrs. These tales so powerfully impressed Joseph and his brothers that they even tried to imitate their glorious achievements by wandering off into the woods to become hermits with provisions enough to last about a day. Here they were traced by their anxious relatives at nightfall and brought back tired and cold but with their missionary zeal, no whit diminished. As Joseph grew older, he showed intense love and spiritual understanding of the virtue of self-denial and mortification. This he practiced in secret and went so far as to lie by night on a plank which he laid over his bed, secreting it by day, until his mother upon discovering it, forbade the practice.

Though quite a natural boy, he always seemed a little apart from his companions, liking to reflect and to listen to that inward voice ever vocal within his soul. He was extremely sensitive as all such rare natures are, and shrank under the slightest word of reproof; but at the same time of a most happy disposition and engaging manner, with a winning smile

that disarmed all unfriendliness. This sunny nature was to be one of his greatest helps when faced with the most terrible conditions in the material and spiritual sphere ever encountered by a human being. He loved to follow the flocks to pasture and was frequently to be seen in company with the shepherds, earning thereby the endearing appellation of "The Little Shepherd."

His love of animals and sympathy for any neighbor in trouble is shown in a moving episode where we see him keeping an all-night vigil over a poor woman's sick cow. The cow was the poor woman's sole support and it was on the point of death. When morning dawned, the animal was definitely on the road to recovery.

His love for study seemed to indicate that he was not meant for agricultural pursuits. His parents therefore decided to send him to college at Braine-le-Comte, with a view to a commercial career. At the time, there was no idea or sign that he would develop a religious vocation, as his brother, Auguste, had done.

Chapter II

The Passing Years

At Braine-le-Comte, he followed his studies with the greatest zeal. A mission there held by the Redemptorist Fathers sowed the seed of his future vocation in no uncertain manner, or rather forced the growth of that seed which was within him from his earliest years. Shortly after this, he hints of his vocation in a letter to his parents. His sister Pauline had already entered religion, and Auguste had become a novice in the Picpus Fathers. He asked therefore for their consent, and having obtained it, he entered the same Order, the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. His education not being sufficient to qualify him as a candidate for the priesthood, he had to be content with becoming first a lay brother, but, by dint of hard work and study, he was soon admitted to the ranks of ecclesiastical students. He chose as his name in religion that of Damien, after the saint-physician who, with his brother, Cosmas, had suffered martyrdom. It was a well-chosen name surely for him, who was later to spend his life curing not only the spiritual but also the terrible physical ills of his poor suffering leper children. He spent his novitiate in Paris, a zealous, holy novice practicing mortification and self-denial on every occasion, a fit preparation for that life of sublime achievement awaiting him though all unconscious of the future. These voluntary hardships of mortification never affected his health, being of the most robust constitution and bodily strength. The foundation of his future work was built up here in long prayerful commune with God, in arduous application to work and detail, in perseverance and intense, prolonged effort, developing

a naturally strong character into a force and power, which was to fit him for the colossal task before him—the great act of martyrdom. This is not accomplished in a day or a year, but is the slow and steady growth, the outcome of a long period of daily and incessant self-immolation.

Chapter III

Damien Sets Sail

However, Damien's great desire was for the missionary life. He never lost sight of this goal since he joined what was primarily a missionary Congregation. He had long taken the great missionary saint, Francis Xavier, as his special patron, and endeavored to model his life on the "Apostle of the Indies." In 1825, Pope Leo XII had placed the conversion of the Sandwich Islands under the care of the Picpus Fathers, and missionaries were dispatched there from time to time. His brother, Pamphile, now ordained, was among the number selected to sail but, within a few weeks of his departure, he fell a victim to typhus fever. This was Damien's opportunity.

He offered himself in his brother's place. Though still in Minor Orders, his superiors acceded to his proposal, and Damien sailed in The Cross after a week's retreat and a brief visit of leave-taking to his home at Tremaloo.

The party, which included five fathers, met in Paris and proceeded to the port of Bremerhaven where their sailing vessel was ready for departure. In Paris before leaving, he had his photograph taken; it represents him with a strong face of intense earnestness, clear steady gaze, the face of an Aloysius, telling of latent powers of strength and endurance and burning zeal. A slight shortsightedness had lately compelled him to wear spectacles, which are noticeable in the picture.

Damien set sail on the Feast of All Saints, 1 November 1863, bidding farewell forever to home and parents and country. After five months of rough sailing in the South Seas with terrific storms which threatened to wreck their vessel they rounded Cape Horn and ploughed through the Pacific (which on this occasion belied its name) and came to anchor in Honolulu, the capital of the Sandwich Islands, on the Feast of Damien's patron, Saint Joseph, 19 March 1864.

Chapter IV

The Hawaiian Islands

This group of islands (also known as the Hawaiian) was discovered in 1778 by Captain Cook. Even at the time of Damien's arrival, idolatry and human sacrifice were largely practiced, though the Picpus Fathers had been sending missionaries periodically for forty years. They were lucky, however, in the fact that the native king was favorable to them, and welcomed their arrival. Nevertheless, a colossal task awaited Damien and his companions.

The islands were also covered with volcanoes, some very active with frequent eruptions covering the ground with lava and making travel, which was mostly on foot, no easy matter.

Before taking up his duties, Damien was required to complete his studies at the Island College and receive ordination. This took place at Whitsun following his arrival in the Honolulu Cathedral by Bishop Maigret, who was henceforth to be his firm friend as well as superior. The next day, he celebrated his first Mass. We can well imagine the feelings of Damien on this, the greatest occasion of his life, this, the consummation of all his lifelong hopes and earliest desires—the signal acceptance by God of the complete dedication of his life. At this, his first Mass, he communicated to a large number of natives lately steeped in paganism, assembled to testify their belief in the One True God and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. What feelings of awe and fervor must have filled his heart at that sublime moment when he held between his hands the Body of Christ brought down to earth in obedience to the Words of Consecration.

English being the language spoken in the islands, he took up its study, and with his usual thoroughness mastered it quickly and spoke it constantly in later years. He was ordered first to the Island of Hawaii to the district of Puna, comprising some eight villages where Christianity was very little known, having been without a priest for several years.

His first work was to construct a church. His heart went out at once to his people, whom he described as, "Gentle, pleasant-mannered, exceedingly tender hearted, they are most hospitable and will deprive themselves of necessities to supply your every want if you ask a night's shelter of them." From the very first, he loved these, his pagan children, and in spite of hardship and exile, strangeness of scenes and surroundings he was happy.

Shortly after this, Damien took over a much larger parish at Kohala, which took thirty days to cover. Here he built two additional churches, mostly with his own hands. His great bodily strength and manual training stood him here in good stead. The lazy natives were ever in astonishment at his stupendous feats of strength and energy. They considered it a miracle when they saw him carrying huge beams of wood uphill, beams

which three or four of them together could not lift. The bells for his church had not arrived from home as promised, so he used a horn to summon his flock to service. The churches were usually made of timber and the worshippers sat on mats instead of chairs or benches.

For about eight years, he labored at Kohala, and then in one of his letters home an ominous note is struck. The beautiful blue of sea and sky, the smiling face of lavish nature hid a hideous poison that lurked in its midst—the scourge of leprosy.

"Leprosy," he writes, "is beginning to be very prevalent here. It is very rarely cured and very dangerous, being highly contagious."

Chapter V

The Scourge of Leprosy

Unclean! Unclean! With what horror has this despairing cry of the leper filled humanity down through the centuries!

Nor is the cry silent even today.

Leprosy, that loathsome and deadly plague for which no cure has even yet been discovered, is as old as man himself. Its beginnings are lost in antiquity; but authorities agree that it originated in the Valley of the Nile, and mention is made in the sixteenth century before Christ, in the Ebers Papyrus, of the scourge sweeping through the country. From there, it spread to Italy and was carried by the Romans, in their invasion of the other European countries to France, Spain, and finally to England. In the time of the Crusades, it spread to such an extent that it is said that half the population was stricken with the disease and there were lepers in the church, in the state, and even on the throne. By the fourteenth century, it had almost disappeared, helped, no doubt, by the terrible Black Death that swept over Europe carrying off almost half of the population.

Leprosy became epidemic in the Hawaiian Islands about the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1865, it had reached such proportions that an Act was passed to segregate the lepers. A settlement was chosen in one of the smaller islands of the group—Molokai, an island seven or eight miles wide and about thirty-eight in length. The island was by nature admirably adapted for the purpose, being cut in two by enormous cliffs and mountains of volcanic origin. To this island, the lepers were shipped from Honolulu, and it was a heart-rending sight to see these poor creatures being torn by force from their homes, relatives, and friends to banishment and certain death in that abode of misery and despair at Molokai.

Chapter VI

"I will go to Molokai."

Damien had frequently witnessed the heart-rending scene of the departure of these unfortunate creatures doomed to exile in the living death at Molokai. In the words of an eyewitness, "These miserable beings, with a dazed look of lingering death in their fearful countenances, were soon disposed on the deck of a small outward-bound craft. Then, in the few moments that intervened between the casting off the shoreline and the craft making for the mouth of the harbor, the pitiful wail of men, women, and children was renewed. Those on the shore wrung their hands and tears coursed down their ashen cheeks. Those on the departing vessel brooding for a time as in dull agony, but then an unearthly cry would ring over the tranquil sea. It was their long farewell."

Damien, pondering their fate and his heart torn with sympathy, longed to help them and reflected on what their life in the lazaretto must well be.

He thought that faith must die from their despairing hearts with no priest being resident or regularly visiting the island. Physically and morally, they were sunk in the very depths of degradation and abject misery. Some of them were his own dear converts whom he had himself had washed in the saving waters of Baptism, now to lapse once more into utter darkness.

He knew no rest and no comfort until the desired opportunity arose to come to their aid. This chance was not long delayed. In May 1873, on the dedication of a new church by Bishop Maigret at which several missionaries were assembled, his Lordship spoke with sadness of Molokai and the fate of the poor lepers where Government restrictions made it almost impossible to send a visiting priest. This discourse struck on the listening ears of Damien as the answer to his fervent yet secret prayer. Here was his chance then. Coming forward he offered himself with simple directness to his Bishop saying, "Monsignor, if you will be kind enough to allow it, I will go to Molokai and labor for the poor lepers whose wretched state of bodily and spiritual misfortune has often made my heart bleed within me."

This declaration, this voluntary offering, which sounded so simple, what did it mean? It was a self-imposed death sentence; self-condemnation to a living death of fifteen years duration, cut off from his own kindred, surrounded by unimaginable horrors, shortly to be in the grip of that same dread implacable disease that made the inhabitants of the grey island shunned by humanity. He would be one of them forever. In that sense, he would be also an outcast. The Bishop, though somewhat taken by surprise, knew enough of Damien's steadfast character to recognize that this was no rash impulse—no wild offer

made on the spur of the moment. Glancing at Damien's eager face lit up by enthusiasm; but in whose quiet and steady gaze the light of a calm, undaunted purpose shone, he accepted God's volunteer for front-line service.

Taking hurried departure for Honolulu, where a boat was leaving that very day with its sad contingent for Molokai, Damien and his bishop got on board just before it sailed. So quickly had the whole matter been decided that Damien embarked without time to say good-bye to his friends or to collect his clothes and personal belongings. Empty-handed indeed he might be of material things, but oh, how full of spiritual gifts!—the offering of himself soul, body, health, and happiness at the feet of the Good Samaritan whose example he would humbly follow.

As the steamer reached Molokai, the wretched inhabitants came trooping down to the shore to greet the new arrivals. Damien beheld his new parishioners—unkempt, dirty, ragged, and in various stages of the disease, some of them were maimed and limbless. The bishop, having presented to them their new pastor, and with a final benediction and affectionate farewell to Damien returned to Honolulu.

Chapter VII

At the Foot of Calvary

Damien was left alone. He had put his foot upon the Calvary of his own choosing. He must climb as Christ did the *Via Dolorosa* to Golgotha's heights. There was no turning back and he would not if he could. However, that does not mean there was no sense of horror, no heart sinking to almost panic in his soul as the boat faded into the distance and he was left alone—doomed forever in this living graveyard at Molokai. He would not be human otherwise and Damien was very human and in the prime of his glorious youth and vigorous manhood (he was now thirty-three). We can but dimly guess his feelings at that time. He stood utterly alone, unaided, with no worldly possessions but the clothes that covered him, his hurried departure having prevented him from securing even a change of linen. Around him the tropical night is falling rapidly and he needed to seek some shelter.

Approaching some of the wretched huts that served as dwellings for the most acute cases and noting the nauseating stench that emanated from them due to the terrible condition of filth and squalor, he found that shelter there would not be possible. Night in the open under the clear canopy of heaven would be immensely preferable. Looking about him for some kindly bush or tree beneath whose friendly branches he might pass the night, he caught sight of a large pandanus tree. Here he encamped for the night under a sky of sapphire blue, dotted with a million stars. What his thoughts, his feelings, his prayers

were as he lay or knelt during the long watches of the night are known alone to his God with whom he held commune. We can but touch reverently on the threshold of such hallowed ground, it would be sacrilege to go further.

Let us take a brief glance around the Grey Island that is to be Damien's home. The island, the smallest of the group, is cut in two by enormous precipices running north and south. At the foot of these lies a stretch of land forming a peninsula completely cut off by the towering cliffs from the rest of the island. This was the site chosen for the leper settlements of Kalawao and Kalaupapa. Well named the "Grey Island," the light of the sun never penetrated the rocky heights that reared above it, while below the sea roared and foamed, in wintertime flooding the flat plain that held the wretched hovels of the lepers. The soil was barren and rocky, covered with lava formations from a volcano on the island. The lepers (about 800 in number) were housed in dilapidated huts that offered little protection from the weather. The huts were made of tree branches covered with grass and leaves. In these, the worst and most helpless cases herded together, the less afflicted preferring to lie about in the open in the shelter of a wall or rocky slope.

The condition of these wretched specimens of humanity was truly deplorable, clothed in rags, filthy, emaciated, in every stage of the dread disease they lay about, many of them waiting for death. Some whose very limbs had been eaten away crawled on all fours like animals. The better cases, in whom the malady was less advanced, sometimes came to the aid of those *in extremis*. More often, they were engaged in amusing themselves as best they might by gambling and drinking a home-brewed intoxicant made from a native plant called "Ki."

The untillable soil, their only resource, made agricultural work impossible. In addition, there was no one to organize or instruct them in building, carpentry, or other employment and there were no raw materials for such activities. The Government did almost nothing for them, but shipped them there by the hundreds, gave them a few head of cattle and a very small quota of provisions, and told them to shift for themselves for the rest.

Such were the conditions when Damien came to the island. Mismanagement and neglect by the authorities and the conditions of the island and of the lepers themselves constituted a state of affairs of indescribable horror. Starvation, lawlessness, and misery prevailed. The dying were neglected and left to die untended while the others ate up all the food provided by the Government and dosed themselves with "Ki," which drove them mad causing the place to become a veritable hell of unimaginable horror.

Such was the doomed island when the gentle Damien came to its sinister shores. Such was the task he had voluntarily undertaken in this living graveyard—the task to reform the bodies and spirits of these human derelicts. If we contrast this picture (not exaggerated in the least) with the one he left behind him sixteen years later when his

beloved children with lonely, breaking hearts laid his body beneath that same pandanus tree, we must pause and, with awe, acknowledge that God truly worked a miracle through his servant, Damien.

Chapter VIII

Damien Builds

Whether Damien came to the island in the first instance with his mind made up to remain permanently is not known. What is quite certain is that, after a short time spent there and seeing the plight of its wretched inhabitants, he resolved definitely and finally to be one of them to the end. As he says of himself later, "I made myself a leper among the lepers to gain all for Jesus Christ." Coming primarily as a priest for the eternal salvation of his leper flock, Damien realized that, if he hoped to reach their souls, he must start on the lower plane of their material needs. As we have seen, he was eminently practical, possessing a large amount of that very necessary quality in priest or layman—common sense. This he made haste to apply. The first work to be undertaken was the matter of a water supply. The filthy condition of the people was largely due to lack of water, the only supply available being some miles away and the lepers were mostly incapable of fetching it from such a distance. Having discovered a spring of constant fresh water not far from Kalawao, he applied to the Government for a supply of water pipes. With the help of a party of the able-bodied lepers, the pipes were laid. This made a wonderful improvement in conditions, as the cleansing of their rags could be accomplished and, by degrees, bathing and washing became a daily routine. He next turned his attention to housing conditions. The recent storms and high tides had swept away their wretched huts and the whole community now lay in the open on mats of grass and leaves, greatly aggravating their condition.

Damien again made application to the Government for timber and other building materials. Soon, he and some willing helpers, who were roused to activity by his inspiring example and wonderful energy, were hard at work building and constructing strong wooden dwellings—the laborers' cottages of the settlement. In a few years, hundreds of these were dotted over the peninsula, brightening the dreary landscape with their brightly painted fronts. What a miracle of material progress in such a little time!

He next tackled the authorities on the food question. Hitherto the supplies had been inadequate. Fresh milk, so necessary to the extreme cases, was entirely lacking. The supply under his continued demands became better and more regular, until finally each person was provisioned with a regular weekly ration of meat, milk, and poi (a species of native arrowroot).

Their interest in life was reawakened, and, with it, a love of order and beauty. They took delight in the adornment of their houses and gardens, some of which were a pleasure to behold.

He next turned his attention to clothing. The few garments provided annually to each leper were insufficient and generally developed into raggedness in a short time, leaving them exposed to cold and wet, adding more misery to their misery.

Damien, by collecting stores of clothing from charitable friends and interested benefactors, accumulated the wherewithal to open clothing stores in the few villages now established. He then persuaded the authorities to grant an annual allowance to each leper for the purchase of their apparel. This, besides ensuring a better-clothed community, had the additional important effect of restoring their lost self-respect. Thus, Damien was establishing a revival of civilization among these poor benighted creatures.

His next work was that of hospital accommodation. Hitherto the conditions for the treatment of the sick (or rather the extreme cases—for almost all were sick) were deplorable. There was no hospital in any way worthy of the name. There were no bandages, medicines, or medical supplies of any kind to alleviate the condition of the poor sufferers. The only substitute was an old disused shelter used to house the dying in their last hours. They were carried into this shelter in the last stages of the disease and left there to die almost unattended.

We can imagine what horrors Damien encountered in his endeavors to tend the sick, to lessen their sufferings, and to help them die. With his usual energy and resourcefulness, he succeeded after a considerable time in establishing a regular dispensary where a doctor was daily in attendance. Meanwhile, all he could do was to go about himself, with one or two helpers, and dress the sores of the more helpless cases—washing, bathing, and nursing, often carrying out his ministrations during the long watches of the night. He did these things in addition to farming, building, and carpentry during the day. Often, indeed, his bed never saw him at all, as with a hot bath and a light meal he began another day. He spent much of his day at carpentry, making all the doors and window frames of the houses as well as all the coffins used on the island.

Up until this time, as the poor lepers died, they were thrown only a foot or two below the surface of the earth, often with no coffin. There, wild dogs frequently disinterred them, causing acute danger to the general health of the remaining inhabitants. During Damien's sixteen years residence, he is said to have made 1000 coffins with his own hands and is further said to have buried 1600 lepers.

Damien's live-wire activity was not long in effecting a marked improvement in general conditions. He was then able to direct his attention to the building of a church. He collected some helpers from the abler-bodied men. They, inspired by his enthusiasm,

became willing co-operators. He soon established a church in both Kalawao and Kalaupapa, so he was able to say in 1874, "These ten years I have been on the mission I have built a church or chapel every year."

His keenest sympathies were called forth by the leper children, the boys and girls of the island who wandered about neglected and uncared for, many of them orphans and homeless. He formed a plan to establish schools and orphanages for these poor waifs and strays. Within five or six years after his landing, he had the joy of seeing his hopes fulfilled. Damien had succeeded in making two homes, one for girls and one for boys and he made open-air classes available for those children who were able to reside with their parents. He was himself their teacher, and this was, indeed, a labor of love, for he was a passionate lover of children. To his poor orphans especially he was both an earthly and a spiritual father. Their interests and their care were ever in his mind, and he could be constantly seen on his daily rounds surrounded by a group of these little ones or in the evening playing tag and ball and other games with them. Then he was at his best and happiest, then his laugh rang loudest. Even on his deathbed, the fate of these, his little leper-children, was his only cause of worry and uneasiness. "What will become of my poor leper boys and girls when I am gone," he asked anxiously.

Chapter IX

Damien's Reforms

Damien also faced much difficult work in the direction of reforming the bad habits, abuses, and lawlessness that existed on the island.

The worst evil, and the source of most of the other vices, was that of drink. The natives, as we have said, concocted a vile intoxicant made from a mountain plant called Ki, under the influence of which they became like lunatics and devils and ran around wild, committing every kind of excess. Gambling, impurity, and every other evil could be traced to this source.

Damien resolved therefore to attack this illicit distillation at its source and stamp it out. This was no easy matter, as the owners of these illicit stills refused to give them up. However, by dint of fines and the help of the law, where persuasion was of no effect, Damien succeeded in getting them handed over, but not without incurring many bitter enmities, all of which was to have its repercussion in the evil charges some of them brought against the saintly priest after his death.

His 1886 report to the authorities (in the following paragraphs) describes the conditions with which he had to cope since his arrival.

> "Another source of immorality is intemperance. There grows along the sides of the mountains a plant that the natives call Ki, the root of which, when fermented and distilled, yields a highly intoxicating liquor that, owing to the crude and imperfect distilling process, is unfit for drinking. The distilling of this liquor was being carried on to a horrible extent when I arrived and its consequences can be more easily imagined than described on paper. Under its influence, the natives would abandon all decency and run about naked and acting as though mad. . .
>
> "The Agent and I went around and, at last, by threats and persuasion got the natives to give up their stills."

When Damien first came to the island, the non-Catholics outnumbered the Catholics. By his colossal energy and superhuman activity, before his death the Catholics formed two-thirds of the population and their church-funds and property were considerable. Damien was a watchful shepherd who did not hesitate at "lifting the lazy ones on with his stick."

It is said that, on Sunday morning, as he ascended the pulpit he cast his searching glance over the congregation, marked the absent ones missing from their accustomed places, and Monday morning saw him early at their huts enquiring the reason of their absence and taking nothing but illness as excuse. Nor was his work confined to the Settlements alone, but extended for a considerable time to the whole island.

Climbing the narrow trail across the mountain, he organized various parishes all over Molokai and built several churches for the people. His zeal in the cause of the faith was unbounded—it extended to all whom he considered he owed a debt. It was probably this fierce ardor that later earned him, in the opinion of Reverend Doctor Hyde, the description of "bigoted and intolerant."

If striving ceaselessly to convert the lepers to the Catholic faith and winning them to religion by every means in his power, including being strict about attendance at Mass—if this was being "bigoted and intolerant" he must plead guilty to the charge. If Reverend Doctor Hyde meant that Damien ever refused (secretly or openly) to come to the help of any poor leper because he was a non-Catholic, the charge was utterly false.

In the beginning, Damien's help and energy extended to all lepers of every religion but, as the settlement developed under better Government-control, his activities gradually limited themselves to the members of his own faith.

Chapter X

Damien's Apostolate

Added to his other difficulties were many in his own spiritual affairs. Among others, he had difficulty finding a priest to whom he might confess. For this reason, he went to Honolulu shortly after landing. On his return, he was notified by the Government that the stringency of the leper-laws forbade his visiting the other islands again under penalty of arrest. Thus, cut off from intercourse with his bishop and other priests, his difficulty forced him on one occasion to have recourse to a striking and unusual method of confession.

The bishop was making one of his periodical visitations to the islands. As the steamer approached Molokai, the bishop requested to be put ashore to enable Father Damien to make his Confession. The captain refused to put ashore, saying that it was contrary to the Government's orders. Instead, they cast anchor close to the shore and, signaling to the priest to approach by boat to the ship's side, the Bishop stood by the rail of the steamer, while Father Damien made his Confession in French, kneeling in the boat, separated from his confessor by a strip of water.

What a striking picture this conjures up in our minds—the steamer anchored in the tropical waters of the Pacific, brilliant blue of sea and sky, the bishop leaning over the ship's side, his hand raised in absolution, the little boat far below where knelt the priest—penitent reciting his sins aloud in all simplicity and humility. Surely, this is a striking and unforgettable scene and typical of Damien, who never allowed any difficulty to come between him and a definite duty.

Thus, Damien went with ceaseless activity from one reform to another, building a monument of work for himself, but gaining the satisfaction of seeing most of his projects materialize and his community emerge into a happy and ordered state of life. The Grey Island, the Doomed Island, could be called so no longer. Despair was banished and instead a large measure of contentment reigned amid happiness—in the words of a visitor, "The faces one sees are nearly always happy faces."

Writing about this time, Damien says, "I am happy to say that, thanks to a kind Providence, my labors here, which seemed almost vain at the beginning, have been greatly crowned with success."

However, it took all Damien's sublime charity to bear the horrors with which his work brought him in contact. "Many a time," he said, "in fulfilling my priestly duty at their domiciles, I have been compelled to run outside. One day at a Sunday Mass, I found myself so stifled that I thought I must leave the altar to breathe a little of the outer air."

Later, he adopted the use of tobacco, the smell of which helped modify other offensive odors. He commented, "Now my sense of smell does not cause me so much inconvenience and I enter the huts of the lepers without difficulty. Sometimes, indeed, I still feel some repugnance when I have to hear the confessions of those near their end. Also, I often am scarce to know how to administer Extreme Unction."

His great zeal for souls and Catholicism was infectious and, led by his striking example, the results among his leper flock were most encouraging. Whenever the little church at Kalawao was open, there was always to be seen a poor leper kneeling in adoration, in fact, the church was never empty. He kept up the ceremonial as best he could, using a set of golden altar vessels—a gift from France—and was helped with other church decoration and equipment by the nuns at Honolulu.

He also founded a confraternity called the Guild of Perpetual Adoration, the rules of which included prayers for the world outside their stricken island. What a perfect interpretation of the doctrine of the Communion of Saints.

Processions of the Blessed Sacrament were also held on the principal feasts. The processions appealed powerfully to the natives and caused them the greatest joy to participate. Every leper that could possibly do so took part in the processions. Dressed in their best, the little leper children strewed petals from their flower-baskets on the path of the Blessed Sacrament borne by their beloved pastor. Men and women, old and young, the strong, and the weak marched reverent and happy singing hymns and bearing banners, some crippled and almost limbless crawling bravely on all fours bringing up the rear.

When Father Damien carried Holy Viaticum to the dying during sick calls, it was with procession and lighted candles, as in other Catholic countries. Much joy and consolation filled the heart of Damien on these occasions.

In 1874, he writes of the death of one of his flock saying, "His death was extremely edifying. Longing for heaven, he was constantly repeating the words of Saint Paul, 'I long to be dissolved and to be with Christ.' When I came with the Holy Viaticum to his bedside, his faith and love shone forth unmistakably on his countenance. He is buried under the great cross I have erected in the middle of our new cemetery. With him lie nearly two hundred other lepers who have died Catholics this last year and a half."

These consolations alone made his life on the island bearable. The bond of their common faith made a link that relieved his otherwise intolerable loneliness for, during his first five or six years of residence, every other inhabitant of the settlement was a native. Often, the feeling of utter loneliness was so overwhelming that he confessed, "Without the Blessed Sacrament, a position like mine would not be tolerable."

He pointed out the same Divine source of consolation to his poor afflicted lepers in their otherwise hopeless misery and despair. "Go to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament," he said, "He will not fail you. He alone will receive and comfort you and help you to bear your affliction. He will even turn your sorrow into joy."

Chapter XI

Damien-The Man

Thus, we have touched on Father Damien's work as a priest and pastor. He was the Apostle bringing light and hope to the abandoned leper sunk in utter darkness and despair. We have seen him, alone and unaided, facing hopeless odds, achieving the impossible. Where there was paganism and depravity, by his sublime courage and influence, he brought hope, resignation, and happiness.

Instead of stones, he gave these poor outcasts spiritual bread, relieving their misery by the consolation of religion and the hope of heaven. By the example of his burning zeal and loving sympathy, he won over the poor leper to God, taught him a love and kindliness to his afflicted brother and a respect for the dead. This was Damien's perfected priestly duty for he was above all a missionary by vocation and desire from his childhood days. We have seen him, too, as a pioneer in more material things. He worked no less a miracle on the material plane to accomplish his sublime object on the supernatural plane. He did so knowing the souls of the poor afflicted people must be reached by first alleviating their woes and improving their worldly condition while never losing sight of the fact that it was as a Catholic Missionary he had come among them, primarily and before all—to win them to God. He was therefore a slave in their bodily service. He was their nurse, doctor, builder, carpenter, farm laborer, coffin maker, and the versatile and many-sided genius who evolved order out of chaos; cleanliness, self-respect, and happiness out of abject misery; and a well-ordered community in pretty villages with churches, hospitals, and orphanages—all accomplished practically single-handed.

There is another aspect of this marvelous leper-priest that it is worthwhile to examine—Damien the man. For saints, as we are sometimes inclined to forget, are also men and women of flesh and blood as we ourselves, and they are subject to the same weaknesses and human frailties. To think that Damien never flinched from the horrors he encountered and never shrank in spirit from the future and its dread possibilities is to contemplate an impossible and scarcely human individual. Damien was none of these things. He was an exemplary priest and a perfect missionary, but he was a very human character overall. He was no visionary or contemplative, no Saint Francis or Saint Theresa, no high philosopher or metaphysician, and no learned doctor of the Church like

Saint Ambrose or Saint Thomas Aquinas. He was but a plain and simple man, with theological and philosophical studies perforce cut short by the exigency of missionary demands. He was not an ascetic except as he had to deny himself all in the pursuance of his overmastering desire—the salvation of the leper.

Later, he was accused of many faults and even vices, by Reverend Doctor Hyde and others. However, these were all refuted by an overwhelming balance of evidence showing the accusations to be the lying reports of venomous enemies whom every great reformer makes in the course of his reform—the enemies he unwillingly made among the Government he was forced to fight continually to compel them to concede justice and humanity to his poor leper flock. He made other enemies among the abandoned and lawless elements of the community when he broke their power in the areas of vice and drinking. These enemies had been forced to yield to his rule and their implacable enmity later inspired them to repeat the foulest lying tales of the saintly Damien—tales that none but the prejudiced and envious mind of someone like Hyde would dream of entertaining. He was also accused of being dirty, intolerant, and bigoted. It may be true that he was somewhat careless of his appearance. A, visitor to the island describes him by saying, "His dress was worn and faded, his hair tumbled like a schoolboy's, and his hands stained and hardened by toil. However, the glow of health was in his face and the buoyancy of youth in his manner, while his ringing laugh, his ready sympathy, and his inspiring magnetism told of one who, in any sphere, might do a noble work."

His "intolerance and bigotry," as we have said above, can be dismissed as the protestant inability to distinguish between Catholic missionary zeal and those undesirable qualities so entirely alien to Damien's real character.

His was a heart capable of the greatest love and devotion, and he poured it out lavishly on his beloved leper children. He was their willing and devoted slave even to death. He was, at the same time, possessed of great power and influence over them and, though loved devotedly, was also not a little feared, though more with the fear of dutiful children to a loving father. The erring ones often came up against his moral superiority and had to bend before it. He was of a happy and cheerful nature and his laugh rang out frequently and spontaneously. His temper was quick and sometimes betrayed him into saying somewhat unkind things. Then, a little later, the episode would apparently be forgotten and he would speak as if the whole matter had passed from his mind. He had a most lively sense of humor and could well enjoy a joke even against himself. He was also accused of being autocratic, high-handed, and hard to get on with. To be quite impartial, there seems to be some truth in this statement. From time to time, a priest was sent to the settlement to help him. Generally, they departed after a time having experienced a

measure of failure to get on with one another. It is possible that Damien felt he, who had constructed all from its crudest foundations, understood the work and the problem as no one else could and insisted on his way of handling it. This may have earned him the title of "high-handed" and "stubborn."

All these points only emphasize his humanity, his natural limitations. Consideration and acknowledgment of these slight frailties only serve to throw into relief the height to which his holiness soared—that lofty summit that leaves our poor dimmed vision strained in the effort of contemplation. Before he reached that sublime peak, however, his soul and body were to pass through the darkest depths of agony and affliction, wringing from him the tragic declaration, "I make myself a leper among lepers to gain all for Jesus Christ."

Chapter XII

The Way of the Cross

From the beginning of his work among the lepers, Father Damien had always faced the probability, if not certainty, of becoming himself a leper. Up to ten years after his coming to Molokai, there was no definite sign of the disease attacking him. Some accounts relate to his having suspicions that the malady was lurking in his system for many years before any unambiguous evidence was apparent. Under the circumstances, the wonder is that it did not attack him long before, for he had been in the closest contact with the disease in the most advanced stages from the time he arrived in Hawaii in 1864. However, it was not until 1884 that there was any certainty about the matter. One Sunday about this time, he climbed the pulpit to address his leper congregation. Listening attentively to their beloved pastor, they heard him use the words, "We lepers….." This simple phrase conveyed the tidings of the dread reality to his fellow-sufferers. He was now their beloved apostle more than ever, one of them in the very fullest sense. How suspicion became certainty to Damien is related in one of his letters to his brother, Pamphile, and in another letter to his dear friend, Brother Joseph, who tended him in his last illness. He tells of one day when he had taken a long and tiring walk and upon returning home decided to refresh himself with a hot footbath. He plunged his feet into the steaming water—but felt no heat, no sensation. Damien was too experienced in the symptoms of leprosy not to recognize what this meant, for one of the surest signs of the disease is the loss of sensation in any part.

On another occasion, when shaving, some of the scalding water flowed over his bare feet and he felt nothing. The dread conviction was thus borne in upon him—he was a leper. He was at this time but forty-four years of age, of splendid physique, active, otherwise

healthy and full of vigor. In the course of his duties, he never seemed to worry about the danger of infection, though exercising great care in the early days of his ministration. However, as is, perhaps, only natural, familiarity with the disease tended to a gradual relaxing of precautions.

This was probably unconscious or he found that undue care hampered him in his work. It seems he did relax his precautions and lived the same unrestricted mode of life as the lepers. On his rounds, he took part in their customs and social habits, often having to share their meals and even their beds, besides constantly dressing their ulcers, hearing their confessions, and administering Extreme Unction. He seemed to have no fear or undue anxiety of contracting the disease. Once, when asked if he was not afraid of becoming infected, he replied, "If Providence sees fit to afflict me while I am working among the lepers, whether I am worthy or not, I shall gain a crown of thorns."

Yielding to the urgent advice of those interested, Damien tried many treatments and so-called cures. The "goto" treatment from Japan was being much used at the time as a means of alleviating, if not curing, the disease. Damien followed the treatment in a Honolulu hospital for some time; but he was restless to return to his work. Soon, we find him back again after a brief space in Molokai. Shortly before he had written to his bishop, ". . . leprosy has attacked me. There are signs of it on my left cheek and ear and my eyebrows are beginning to fall. I shall be soon quite disfigured. As I have no doubt of the real character of the malady, I remain calm, resigned, and very happy in the midst of my people."

Soon, it was no longer a secret that Damien was a leper. The news went out from the island and spread like wildfire across the world. Letters, gifts, and alms—offerings of every kind came pouring in to Father Damien for his own relief and for the help and comfort of his leper flock. His name was in every mouth. Protestants and Catholics alike applauded him and exalted his sacrifice—the eyes of the world were turned to Molokai. His own people were among the last to hear of it, as Damien feared to break the news to his mother who was aged and ill. It was from a Belgian newspaper the dread fate of her beloved son came to her as she lay dying. "Well then," was her only response, "we shall go to heaven together."

Towards the end of 1888, not many months before Damien's death, he was visited by the English artist, Edward Clifford, a staunch protestant. He made a lengthy visit to the island spending his whole days with Father Damien accompanying him on all his journeys around the settlement, dining with him, and chatting together in the evening as they sat on the verandah of Damien's little villa-presbytery and gazed over the purple-blue sea with a tropical moon casting its silver path across the waters.

Damien would then tell him of the wondrous story of his work upon the island. Thus, their friendship ripened and grew. Clifford spent Christmas at Molokai, throwing his heart into all Damien's Christmas plans and festivities. There was a beautiful Christmas Mass, with Clifford joining in the Adeste Fideles. In the evening, magic lantern pictures of the Life of Our Lord delighted the lepers.

Before leaving the island, Clifford made a sketch of Father Damien, a sad testimony to the ravages the disease had made in his one-time splendid manhood. It shows little of his former grace and good looks except the curly hair and the smiling mouth. The rest was sadly disfigured, hands and face covered with ulcers, ears terribly enlarged, nose deformed and the bridge collapsed—a travesty of his old vivid and attractive countenance.

About the beginning of the New Year, the Franciscan Sisters arrived to take over charge of the female orphanage. The change was not to be effected until after Damien's death, which was not far off. Each day saw him growing visibly weaker and less equal to his duties. Yet, the spirit of Damien could not be conquered easily. He was determined to die in harness. He kept up his usual routine as much as possible, saying his Mass daily until near the end, when his hands became so ulcerous that he could no longer do so. This was a terrible deprivation to him, but he accepted it as he accepted all the rest as the Holy Will of God.

Around this time, in writing to his people, he says, "I am quite happy and contented and, though seriously ill, all I desire is the accomplishment of the Holy Will of God. I am still able, though not without some difficulty, to stand every day at the altar, where I do not forget any of you. Do you in return pray for me, who am being drawn gently towards the grave? May God strengthen me and give me the grace of perseverance and of a happy death."

Chapter XIII

The Ultimate Sacrifice

He kept up bravely until the middle of March, but towards the end of the month, he took to his bed. This in Damien meant the end. Yet, he remained steady and calm, preparing spiritually and temporally for his approaching death, giving minute instructions about business matters and handing over his various charges.

For a long time, Damien had been worried about his poor leper children. "Who will look after my leper boys and girls when I am gone?" he would ask. That was now arranged

for by the arrival of the Franciscan Sisters and his mind was at rest. "The work of the lepers is assured," he said, "I am no longer necessary to them so I am ready to go up yonder."

On 28 March, he made his general confession to his confrere, Father Wendelin, who said to him, "Leave me your mantle, like Elias, when you depart, that I may inherit your great heart." Father Damien's reply showed that even in his last hours his sense of humor and merriment did not desert him. He said, "But what would you do with it, *mon pere?* It is full of leprosy."

The nuns, too, after much pleading, were admitted to his bedside (he was extremely careful lest they should risk infection) and received his last blessing. Though almost incapable of speech, he managed to whisper, "Take----care----of----my----boys." Then, having received their promise to do so, he lay back happy and satisfied. He seemed to rejoice at the thought of his membership in his religious order and would murmur joyfully, "How sweet it is to die a child of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary." He had a happy conviction that he would be in heaven for Easter. "The Good God is calling me to celebrate Easter with Himself. May God be blessed for it."

On 2 April, he received Extreme Unction, but he lingered on until Holy Week. On Monday, 15 April 1899, the end came peacefully. With a smile on his lips, as quietly as a child dropping to sleep, Damien died. The long struggle was over. His great heart was still. That gigantic spirit, that mighty fire, was quenched at last. The long struggle was over. Humble of birth—an obscure Belgian priest—yet at his life's end, the eyes of the whole world were turned upon him. He died a hero and a saint.

The bell tolled its sad tidings across the island. Sorrow and gloom settled down upon his poor flock. Who could ever take his place in their loving, grateful hearts? He was their oldest friend. After God, to him they owed all that they were. He had even given them their hope of heaven. Others there were ready and anxious to carry on the work of Damien. They were all devoted souls, but he was their beloved first friend and deliverer. He was the one who had willingly shared their lives and their fate to the ultimate service. He was the one who had laid down his life for his leper children.

They bore him to his rest on their willing shoulders in sad procession—the nuns, his leper flock, his orphan boys and girls—with breaking hearts and tear-dimmed eyes. They laid him beneath the shade of the spreading pandanus tree that adjoined the church enclosure, that same tree, whose friendly branches were his nightly shelter for many weeks on his first coming to his leper home. This was his own choice. A simple monument marks the spot, on one side are the words, "Father Damien," on the other the inscription:

Sacred to the Memory of Reverend Doctor Damien de Veuster: Died a Martyr to His Charity for the Afflicted Lepers

April 15th, 1889

At Kalaupapa there is a nobler monument, a Celtic cross on the road now called "Damien Road." On the foot of this is written, "The greatest proof of love man can give is to give his life for his friends."

So passed the gentle Damien—leper, apostle, priest, saint, and martyr. He embraced the forlorn cause of his leper brother and found heaven on the way. He came to Molokai, to a den of horror and misery untold, he came impulsively, he saw clearly, he conquered nobly, gloriously.

If Molokai today is a model of leper-settlements to the whole world; if, instead of a model of hideous suffering, depravity, misery, and despair there is ordered cleanliness, care, and—yes, even happiness; if the lepers there have become a prayerful people, leading a life of comfort, holiness, and civilized well-being, it is almost entirely the work of Damien. Others might have completed the work that he made possible; but to Damien must be given the credit of the veritable miracle that was worked during the sixteen years he labored there.

Damien slept among his leper children for forty-seven years. Then his dear lepers had to sorrowfully part with the body of their revered apostle, for it was decided to transfer the remains to his native soil. On 15 April 1936, the anniversary of his death, the American transport ship, *Republic*, took charge of the cherished casket and brought the precious burden to San Francisco on its way to Antwerp, which was reached on 3 May 1936. There, it was met by 100,000 people, headed by King Leopold III himself and the Cardinal Archbishop of Belgium.

The body found its final resting place in the crypt of the Church of the Sacred Hearts at Louvain, a few miles from his own birthplace, where the grave was lined with earth and flowers from his former grave in his beloved Molokai.

There were sorrowful hearts among his leper children in Molokai. His grave was empty, but he will have an eternal resting place in their grateful loving hearts.

Vile tongues soon materialized to defame Damien's memory and to depreciate his work, notably his protestant contemporary, Reverend Doctor Hyde, who wrote vile accusations in the Sydney press a year after Damien's death.

The Reverend Doctor Hyde's Accusations

(Published in the Sydney "Presbyterian," October 26, 1889)

Honolulu, August 2, 1889.

Rev. H. B. Gage,

Dear Brother,

In answer to your inquiries about Father Damien, I can only reply that we who knew the man are surprised at the extravagant newspaper laudations, as if he was a most saintly philanthropist. The simple truth is, he was a coarse, dirty man, headstrong and bigoted. He was not sent to Molokai, but went there without orders; did not stay at the leper settlement (before he became one himself), but circulated freely over the whole island (less than half the island is devoted to the lepers), and he came often to Honolulu. He had no hand in the reforms and improvements inaugurated, which were the work of our Board of Health, as occasion required and means were provided. He was not a pure man in his relations with women, and the leprosy of which he died should be attributed to his vices and carelessness. Others have done much for the lepers, our own ministers, the government physicians, and so forth, but never with the Catholic idea of meriting eternal life.

Yours etc.,

C. M. HYDE.

Stevenson's Vindication of Father Damien

This so outraged author, Robert Louis Stevenson (who was personally acquainted with Damien and his work), that he sprang to Damien's defense in that well-known tract, "*A Reply to the Reverend Doctor Hyde,"* that buried Hyde forever in a grave of obloquy of his own making.

Stevenson's famous letter to the Reverend Doctor Hyde, the occasion of which is fully explained in the extracts given below, is regarded by admirers of Stevenson as a magnificent explosion of decent and virile indignation. A part of it is provided below.

From Robert Louis Stevenson's Open Letter Regarding Father Damien To the Reverend Doctor Hyde of Honolulu

Sydney, February 25, 1890.

Sir,

It may probably occur to you that we have met and visited and conversed; on my side, with interest. You may remember that you have done me several courtesies, for which I was prepared to be grateful. But there are duties which come before gratitude, and offences which justly divide friends, far more acquaintances.

Your letter to the Reverend H. B. Gage is a document which, in my sight, if you had filled me with bread when I was starving, if you had sat up to nurse my father when he lay dying, would yet absolve me from the bonds of gratitude.

If I have at all learned the trade of using words to convey truth and to arouse emotion, you have at last furnished me with a subject. For it is in the interest of all mankind and the cause of public decency in every quarter of the world, not only that Damien should be righted, but that you and your letter should be displayed at length, in their true colors, to the public eye.

Hyde's Letter Analyzed by Stevenson

Damien was coarse.

It is very possible. You make us sorry for the lepers who had only a coarse old peasant for their friend and father. But you, who were so refined, why were you not there, to cheer them with the lights of culture? Or may I remind you that we have some reason to doubt if John the Baptist were genteel; and, in the case of Peter, on whose career you doubtless dwell approvingly in the pulpit, no doubt at all he was a "coarse, headstrong" fisherman! Yet, even in our protestant bibles, Peter is called Saint.

Damien was dirty.

He was. Think of the poor lepers annoyed with this dirty comrade! But the clean Dr. Hyde was at his food in a fine house.

Damien was headstrong.

I believe you are right again; and I thank God for his strong head and heart.

Damien was bigoted.

I am not fond of bigots myself, because they are not fond of me. But what is meant by bigotry, that we should regard it as a blemish in a priest? Damien believed his own religion with the simplicity of a peasant or a child; as I would I could suppose that you do. . . .

Damien was not sent to Molokai, but went there without orders.

Is this a misreading, or do you really mean the words for blame? I have heard Christ, in the pulpits of our Church, held up for imitation on the ground that His sacrifice was voluntary. Does Doctor Hyde think otherwise?

Damien was not a pure man in his relations with women, etc.

This scandal, when I read it in your letter, was not new to me. I had heard it once before; and I must tell you how.

There came to Samoa a man from Honolulu. He, in a public house on the beach, volunteered the statement that Damien had "contracted the disease from having connection with the female lepers."

I find joy in telling you how the report was welcomed in a public house. A man sprang to his feet. (I am not at liberty to give his name but, from what I heard, I doubt if you would care to have him to dinner in Beretania Street. "You miserable little…." (Here is a word

I dare not print, it would so shock your ears.) "You miserable little…," he cried, "if the story were a thousand times true, can't you see you are a million times lower for daring to repeat it?"

I wish it could be told of you that when the report reached you in your house, perhaps after family worship, you had found in your soul enough holy anger to receive it with the same expressions. Ay, even with that one which I dare not print, it would not need to have been blotted away, like Uncle Toby's oath, by the tears of the recording angel. It would have been counted to you for your brightest righteousness.

Instead, you have deliberately chosen the part of the man from Honolulu, and you have played it with improvements of your own. The man from Honolulu—a miserable, leering creature—communicated the tale to a rude knot of beach-combing drinkers in a public house, where (I will agree with your temperance opinions) man is not always at his noblest.

The man from Honolulu had himself been drinking—drinking, we may charitably fancy, to excess.

It was to your "Dear Brother, the Reverend H. B. Gage," that you chose to communicate the sickening story; and the blue ribbon which adorns your portly bosom forbids me to allow you the extenuating plea that you were drunk when it was done.

Yet, I fear you scarce appreciate how you appear to your fellow men. To bring it home to you, I will suppose your story to be true. I will suppose—and God forgive me for supposing it—that Damien faltered and stumbled in his narrow path of duty. I will suppose that, in the horror of his isolation, perhaps in the fever of incipient disease, he, who was doing so much more than he had sworn, failed in the letter of his priestly oath. He, who was so much a better man than either you or me, who did what we have never dreamed of daring—he too tasted of our common frailty.

"O, Iago, the pity of it!" The least tender should be moved to tears; the most incredulous to prayer. And all you could do was to pen your letter to the Reverend H. B. Gage!

Is it growing at all clear to you what a picture you have drawn of your own heart? I will try yet once again to make it clearer. You had a father. Suppose this tale were about him, and some informant brought it to you, proof in hand?

I am not making too high an estimate of your emotional nature when I suppose you would regret the circumstance? That you would feel the tale of frailty the more keenly since it shamed the author of your days? That the last thing you would do would be to publish it in the religious press? Well, the man who tried to do what Damien did, is my Father, and the Father of the man in the Apia bar, and the Father of all who love goodness; and he was your Father too, if God had given you grace to see it.

Statement
by
Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson
to
Ave Maria Press

As to the "Open Letter to Doctor Hyde," nothing can make me believe that Louis ever regretted the subject matter of that piece of writing. To me, up to his last hours, he spoke always in the same strain. His admiration for the work and character of "that saint, that martyr," as he invariably called Father Damien, remained unchanged. Any mention of the cowardly attack on the dead man's memory brought a flush of anger into Louis' face and a fire to his eye that was unmistakable….

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Father Damien was a Seminarian in 1863.

Father Damien in 1873, the year he went to Molokai.

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